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https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/chicago-agency-finds-high-level-of-spilled-chemical-in-lake/2017/04/13/713f2186-20a8-11e7-bb59-a74ccaf1d02f_story.html?utm_term=.3a3b4405f3b2
Longer AP story

EPA: No significant chemical discharge from US Steel spill

By Associated Press By Associated Press April 14 at 4:35 PM

PORTAGE, Ind. — Water samples from Lake Michigan and one of its tributaries show no significant discharge of a potentially carcinogenic chemical from a U.S. Steel Corp. wastewater spill in northern Indiana, the Environmental Protection Agency said Friday.

Results from about 200 water samples showed no significant trace of the chemical hexavalent chromium in the lake or the tributary called Burns Waterway after the Tuesday spill at U.S. Steel's Midwest Plant in Portage, about 30 miles east of Chicago, the agency said.

U.S. Steel said it expected "a controlled, phased and highly monitored restart" would begin Friday at the plant while the EPA and other government agencies conduct water and soil sampling. The restart would occur while a water company's nearby intake remained closed and access to parks and beaches in the area remained restricted, U.S. Steel said.

The plant has sat idle since Tuesday, when the company said an expansion joint failed in a pipe, allowing wastewater to flow into the wrong treatment plant at the Portage complex. That wastewater eventually flowed into Burns Waterway at a point about 100 yards from Lake Michigan.

"Preliminary results of water samples collected by EPA from Burns Waterway and Lake Michigan, including Indiana American Water's intake, on April 12, do not indicate hexavalent chromium impacts in either water body. All results were below EPA's method detection limit of 1 part per billion," the EPA said.

However, the Chicago Department of Water Management said Thursday that its own water sample from Lake Michigan about a mile north of the spill contained 2 parts per billion of hexavalent chromium. That's "a level higher than would be expected to be found in raw lake water," the department said, but just a fraction of the EPA's drinking water standard of 100 parts per billion for all forms of chromium.

U. S. Steel said the restart would begin with operations that do not use chromium and would include water sampling every two hours.

“If elevated levels of chromium are detected, all operations will be immediately shutdown,” the company said. “If all non-chromium-involved lines restart successfully and sampling is acceptable, the lines that involve chromium would be restarted in the same controlled, phased, and highly monitored manner.”

U.S. Steel issued a statement Thursday evening saying it had identified the source of the spill and “has made the necessary repairs.”

The EPA said it recommended that U.S. Steel delay the restart until the agency had sufficient data to show there were no lingering effects to the tributary or Lake Michigan. The agency said it reviewed the restart plan, as did the National Park Service, which closed three beaches at nearby Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

The EPA has said hexavalent chromium — a toxic byproduct of industrial processes — might be carcinogenic if ingested. The toxic heavy metal is used in a variety of industrial processes, including steelmaking and corrosion prevention, and as a pigment in dyes, paints and inks. It’s also found in ash from coal-fired power plants.

A case involving the chemical was made famous by the 2000 film “Erin Brockovich,” which was based on a utility’s disposal of water laced with hexavalent chromium in unlined ponds near Hinkley, California. That disposal method polluted drinking water wells and resulted in a $333 million settlement.

http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/illinois/update-u-s-steel-to-restart-operations-after-toxic-spill/article_6774bd04-a606-5dca-9124-17ccb1ecffea.html

UPDATE: U.S. Steel to restart operations after toxic spill

Northwest Indiana Times

PORTAGE — U.S. Steel plans to restart operations Friday as government agencies continue "robust water and soil sampling" after the company's Midwest facility spilled an undetermined amount of a cancer-causing chemical into a Lake Michigan tributary.

Indiana American Water’s nearby intake — the nearest drinking water intake to the spill site — remains closed until at least Monday and access to certain parks and beaches remains restricted.

The process will begin with a line-by-line restart of operations that do not use chromium, and U. S. Steel will take samples from the facility every two hours, the company said. The

company and participating government agencies will also conduct "vigorous visual inspections and water quality monitoring" at the outfall and surrounding areas, the company stated.

"If elevated levels of chromium are detected, all operations will be immediately shutdown. If all non-chromium-involved lines restart successfully and sampling is acceptable, the lines that involve chromium would be restarted in the same controlled, phased, and highly monitored manner," the company said.

"Overnight and throughout the morning, U. S. Steel continued extensive testing on the repairs made at our Midwest Plant and continues to monitor environmental compliance with all of our systems. Recent sampling has indicated we are in compliance with our water permit limits," the company said.

U.S. Steel detected the leak about 9 a.m. Tuesday, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was notified about 9:30 a.m., officials said. Since that time, the EPA has conducted sampling at the outfall from U.S. Steel's Midwest Plant, Indiana American's water intake, Lake Michigan beaches to the east and west of the waterway and Burns ditch, the agency said.

Preliminary results of water samples collected by the EPA from Burns Waterway and Lake Michigan, including Indiana American Water’s intake, on Wednesday, do not indicate hexavalent chromium impacts in either water body. All results were below EPA’s method detection limit of 1 part per billion.

The federal agency said it took about 100 samples Wednesday and another 100 Thursday following a discharge of wastewater containing hexavalent chromium, a byproduct of industrial processes, into the Burns Waterway.

Four nearby beaches and Indiana American Water's intake at Ogden Dunes have been closed "out of an abundance of caution" in the wake of the spill, officials said.

Drinking water standards

Overnight levels from Tuesday to Wednesday at the outfall were as high as 2,231 parts per billion, according to the EPA. That's about 22 times higher than EPA's federal drinking water standard for total chromium, which includes both trivalent chromium and hexavalent chromium, is 100 parts per billion, according to the EPA's website.

EPA has a national drinking water standard for total chromium of 100 parts per billion, the EPA said Friday. EPA does not have a separate hexavalent chromium standard. However, EPA is currently evaluating health effects data to determine if a hexavalent chromium maximum contaminant level is needed.

Chicago conducted its own sampling this week near its water intake 1 mile from the spill site and detected a hexavalent chromium level of 2 parts per billion, EPA said. Normal levels for hexavalent chromium in Lake Michigan range between 0.14 to 0.15 parts per billion, according to Chicago's Water Management Department.

"Water intake results initially showed hexavalent chromium levels slightly above the detection limit," EPA said. "A confirmation run on that same sample showed that it was at or below the detection limit, well below EPA’s health-based standard for drinking water."

Indiana American continues to operate its Borman Park facility, which is closer to the spill site than Chicago's intake. An Indiana American spokesman said the company is sampling at its Borman Park intake. The supply of water from the Borman Park facility is adequate to meet the needs of the company's customers in Northwest Indiana, he said.

On Wednesday, EPA described levels found in the Burns ditch as low and said water sampling showed hexavalent chromium was not detected in Lake Michigan.

U.S. Steel attributed the spill to an equipment failure from the Tin and Tin Free electroplating process at the Portage plant. Plant processes were shut down after the spill, officials said.

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